WILLIAM CLARK--THE INDIAN AGENT

BY

HARLOW LINDLEY

Professor of History and Political Science in Earlham College

REPRINTED FROM THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE
MISSISSIPPI VALLEY HISTORICAL
ASSOCIATION FOR THE YEAR 1908-1909

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William Clark is probably best known to the people of the United States from his connection with the exploration of the Oregon country; but the close student of the history of our country finds another phase of his life of great interest and of important historical value.

When a mere lad of four years he listened with great avidity to the tales of Indian warfare, and this interest, so early manifested in the Indians, the "red-haired chief" carried with him to the last. He was trained in a good school to develop keenness, courage, and a love for the life of a frontiersman. His hero from babyhood was an older brother — the dauntless George Rogers Clark. His mother was Ann Rogers, from whom he inherited "iron in the blood and granite in the backbone". His father was John Clark, the grandson of a cavalier.

From boyhood William Clark was a person of deeds rather than of words. When about fifteen years of age his parents moved from Virginia westward. The new environment furnished an opportunity for that training which was later to make him famous.

Soon after moving westward he was frequently a member of war parties against the Indians, who were still troublesome. Early in his seventeenth year he enlisted in the Wabash Expedition under his elder brother, George Rogers Clark. In 1789, before he was twenty years old, he joined Colonel John Hardin's expedition against the tribes in Ohio. In 1790 he was sent on a mission to the Creeks and Cherokees of the South. In 1791, with General Scott, he served in the Wabash Indian

expedition, being commissioned first as an ensign and a little later as an acting lieutenant. Two years later he is found in General Anthony Wayne's Western Army. In 1794 he was in charge of an expedition of a train of seven hundred pack horses and eighty men, which he was escorting to Fort Greenville. On this trip he was attacked by Indians, but lost only six men, gallantly repulsing the enemy and eliciting praise from Wayne. In 1795 Clark was sent by Wayne with a message to the Spanish authorities at New Madrid.

In 1796, he retired from the army because of ill health, and for the time being became a young country gentleman, looking after the business of his father's estate. In 1804, he was appointed by President Jefferson, with Captain Meriwether Lewis, to explore the Missouri and Columbia rivers, then unknown to white people, except to a few traders. This expedition opened to the people of the United States a country half as large as Europe. The expedition made Lewis and Clark famous. Clark became the friend of the Nez Perce Flathead Indians, whom he met beyond the Rockies, and in later years they visited him in St. Louis annually, up to the time of his death.

All this gave Clark a thorough knowledge of the way to deal with the Indians, to handle large bodies of men and supplies, and an opportunity to display his courage and resources. These experiences prepared him for the years that followed in his dealings with the Indians, and taught him their habits and character. His life purpose seems to have been to give them a fair deal.

Soon after his return from the Oregon expedition Clark received the appointment of Brigadier General and Indian Agent for Louisiana on March 12, 1807, at Washington, where he and Meriwether Lewis were feasted and courted and regarded as the heroes of the hour. Almost immediately upon receiving his appointment Clark set

out for St. Louis, to begin his real work among the Indians — a work which was to continue for more than thirty years, which was to win for him the love of the race to whom he gave the best years of his life, and which was, in 1820, to bring down upon his head the censure of the politicians who declared that "Clark is too good to the Indians."

The first summer he was very busy quelling Indian disturbances which, it was believed, were incited by the British traders. In October he returned to Virginia where, early in 1808, he was married to Miss Julia Hancock. Very soon after this event he returned to his duties at St. Louis. From this place, under date of July 20, 1810, he wrote that one hundred and fifty Sacs and Foxes were on a visit to the island of St. Joseph in Lake Huron. As this was at a time when British emissaries were at work among the tribes, the worst was feared. The Indians under Black Hawk were forming alliances.

Clark continued to live in St. Louis, busy with affairs of this kind, until the summer of 1812 when the country was startled by the cry that Hull had surrendered to the British. Thus the first encounter of the Second War of Independence had passed into history. Before this Madison had offered the command of the Army of Detroit to Clark, who, feeling that he could serve his country best by attending to the Indians, had gratefully declined. A little later, in December, 1812, he was made Governor of Missouri — which Territory had recently been organized.

All during the war of 1812 hostile tribes were constantly committing great depredations; and in 1814 it was necessary to strengthen the fort at Prairie du Chien. With this in mind Governor Clark set out with an expedition of two hundred men, for, said he, "Whoever holds Prairie du Chien, holds the Upper Mississippi", and a moment later added: "It requires time and a little smok-

ing with Indians, if you wish to have peace with them.'' On the route they encountered some Sacs and Foxes who, being thoroughly frightened, sued for peace. They made no objections to the terms, but gladly promised to take up arms against the enemies of the United States. Dickson, the treacherous English agent who had been inciting the Indians, left Prairie du Chien two days before the arrival of Clark, leaving it in charge of Captain Deace. But the latter left, and when Clark entered the fort he found it deserted. Most of the inhabitants returned, however, and a new fort was in progress of building when Clark left the Prairie.

In the meantime Black Hawk and the British Sacs were not idle. The Indians declared that Dickson had employed an Indian brave to assassinate Clark at Prairie du Chien. This warrior entered the council with murder in his heart, but finding the Americans armed, he was forced to give up the attempt.

Indian depredations did not cease with the Treaty of Ghent, although the tribes were notified of its terms by Governor Clark and others. They continued their warfare, especially in the Missouri Territory, and all effort to come to an understanding proved unavailing. The following is a copy of instructions sent by Monroe, Secretary of War, to the commissioners, Governor Clark, Ninian Edwards, Governor of the Illinois Territory, and Colonel Auguste Chouteau:

Department of War, March 25, 1815.[1]

Sir: —

At the treaty which you as commissioners are authorized to hold with the Indians, the President thinks it will be proper to make some presents to the chiefs and headmen of the tribes who may attend. For this purpose, twenty thousand dollars worth of goods have been directed to be purchased and will be forwarded by Messrs. Johnson and Sibley who will probably

[1] *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, Vol. II, p. 6.

reach St. Louis with them in the first week in June. Whether it will be necessary to distribute the whole of these goods to the Indians will depend upon the number of tribes which attend the treaty, and on the judgment and discretion of the commissioners as to the extent to which presents ought to be made. Should any Indians who have been friendly to the United States attend this treaty, it will be well, in the distribution of presents, to let them feel that those who have been our enemies are not better treated than those who have been our friends. Among the articles to be sent out, there are some solid silver medals; and it having been understood that the late General Pike, when on his expedition up the Mississippi, took from some of the Indians medals which had been given to them by the British, it is requested that, if any of these Indians attend the treaty, a medal of the largest size be given to each of them in lieu of those taken from them by General Pike.

I have the honor to be, etc.

J. Monroe.

His Excellency W. Clark, St. Louis.

Fearing that a treaty might not be satisfactorily concluded at Prairie du Chien, Clark wrote to the Secretary of War that it was well to be prepared for either peace or war. A second letter was written, which sounded a more doubtful note than the preceding. To these letters Monroe replied that the President would use the military force of the United States to suppress the Indians if necessary.

Under date of July 16, 1815, another letter was sent from the commissioners to Monroe from Portage des Sioux, voicing the sentiment that they feared the worst from the attempt at a treaty as the tribes had sent some of the most contemptible of their braves and but few chiefs to treat with them, and these had declared that even should the chiefs agree to relinquish their land the tribes would never consent to it.

Meanwhile Jackson was placed in command of this military district, and Clark, acting under his instructions,

ordered the militia to hold itself in readiness for instant action. These measures had the desired effect, and the tone of the next communication was quite different. Treaties had been concluded with the Pattawatamies, the Piankeshaws, the Yanctons, the Teetons, the Mahas, the Sioux of the Lakes, and the Sioux of the river St. Peters at Portage des Sioux. A little later treaties were also made at the same point with the Kickapoos, the Big and Little Osages, the Sacs of Missouri River, the Foxes and the Ioways. The letter apprising Monroe of this treaty mentioned, also, the division among the Indians about Prairie du Chien concerning the expediency of a treaty, and expressed the belief that hostility had been engendered by British traders.

On October 18, 1815, a long letter was received by the War Department from Clark and his assistants in which they stated they had explicitly followed the directions of the government, but they feared no further treaties could be effected. They spoke of the intriguing of the British traders and of their part in stirring up the Indians. They advised the making of further treaties with those tribes that were friendly. They also cited an instance of the unjust treatment of the Cherokees by the whites, stating that the tribes desired peaceable possession of a definite tract of land, which should be free from the encroachments of the whites.

William H. Crawford was now Secretary of War. In his absence George Graham, Chief Clerk, acting under instructions from the President, authorized Clark to order the removal of all whites settling on Indian territory, promising the assistance of United States troops, if needed.

On October 1, 1815, Clark sent a letter to Crawford plainly stating that he considered a change in the management of Indian affairs expedient. The Indian agents should be given more power to deal with law breakers.

He believed it might be well to establish a department to manage Indian affairs, but admitted his inability to answer the question decisively. He advised the organization of a company with banking privileges.

On May 13, 1816, a treaty was concluded between the United States through her representatives, William Clark, Ninian Edwards and Auguste Chouteau, and the Sacs of Rock River. Reference was made in this treaty to the refusal of these tribes to meet in council at Portage des Sioux and to the depredations since committed by them. But, having grown weary of strife, they were eager to be at peace and earnestly implored mercy. They assented to the conditions of the treaty of 1804 at St. Louis, and agreed to restore all property stolen since the ratification of the Treaty of Ghent before July 1st. Failure to comply with this provision meant a forfeiture of their annuities.

On June 1, 1816, a treaty was made with the Sioux in which the Indians confirmed previous cessions of land and acknowledged themselves subjects of the United States. A similar pledge was entered into between the United States and the Winnebagoes on June 3rd. A portion of this tribe, having separated itself from the rest, promised to remain apart until the others should come into friendly relations with the United States. On August 24th, a treaty was made with the Ottawas, Chippewas, and Pattawatamies in which these tribes promised to relinquish their claim on certain disputed cessions (retaining the right to hunt and fish) in return for "a considerable quantity of merchandise and an annual present for twelve years of one thousand dollars worth of goods and the relinquishment on the part of the United States of certain portions of disputed territory ceded to the general government by the Sacs and Foxes."

Shortly before the consummation of the first of the

above treaties, Crawford sent a letter [2] to Clark and the other agents in which he speaks of further cessions of remote Indian lands in return for annuities as undesirable, since the government is already in possession of more land than is needed for settlement. He does say, however, that it may be expedient to obtain certain cessions in order to make settlements more compact. He fears the tendency of settlers to spread themselves out over the cessions — no matter how distant — and prefers to make this practically impossible. He fears, too, that if a long time intervenes between cession and settlement there is danger of a misunderstanding arising concerning the cession. Such a misunderstanding had already arisen in the Illinois Territory, because of which he instructs the agents to offer presents to quiet the claims of the Indians who have been using it for a hunting ground. Should the original owners make any claim, they must be made to acquiesce in the terms of the contract. But, if they make no claim, presents may be bestowed upon them. He proposes a recession to the tribes of the land north of the northern line of Ohio, west to the Mississippi River and east of the western boundary of Indiana Territory, reserving a military post at the mouth of the Wisconsin, and any other reservations the agents might deem necessary, in exchange for the Indian lands south and west of these lines. If the Indians refuse he leaves it to the discretion of the agents to make terms. He considered it highly desirable to obtain possession of a tract of land connecting the Illinois cession with Lake Michigan. He asks that the agents spare no pains to secure this, providing any of the tribes occupying this territory are present at the council to be held.

On May 21, 1816, William Crawford sent a letter of commendation to the Indian agents for the way in which they had conducted certain affairs with the Indians. He

[2] *American State Papers, Indian Affairs*, Vol. II, p. 97.

referred to cessions of land which might be made from Cherokee and Osage tribes and reiterated the danger of cessions too remote.

Difficulties having arisen between some Cherokees who had emigrated from their tribe and the Osages, it was necessary to run a line of the Osage Purchase from the Missouri to the Arkansas. In the event of the Cherokees having settled on the Osage land, Clark and the other agents wrote the Secretary of War to ascertain what course they should pursue in regard to the improvements made by the Cherokees. But Crawford could not advise in this matter as the tribe had refused to treat with the government concerning these emigrants, declaring they must return and live with their tribe.

Through the efforts of Clark in October, 1818, a treaty was effected between the Cherokees and the Osages and friendly relations were re-established. The Osages ceded a part of their land north of the Arkansas to the United States in payment of property which they had stolen from the citizens. The tribe had, also, decided to live together in one village as advised by Clark and requested that an agent be sent to them.

In 1819 the celebrated conflict over the admission of Missouri as a State arose. When it became evident that it was to be admitted, the question of the choice of a Governor was an important one. Many favored the selection of a new man to succeed Governor Clark on the grounds that the latter had favored the Indian at the expense of the white man — a charge wholly unjust. Just at this time occurred the death of his wife in Virginia. And so, in the midst of the political entanglement Clark was called away to bury the woman who, since the day of her coming into his home, had helped to make his life in the West such a success. When he returned to Missouri it was to find the official chair of the new State filled by a new man. There were many Governors to

follow, but to the day of his death William Clark was given the title of "Governor" Clark. Soon after his return to Missouri he was made Superintendent of Indian affairs, which position he held until his death.

In 1824 treaties were made by Clark with the Ioways and the Sacs and Foxes, in which they renounced all claims to land lying in Missouri. In 1825 similar treaties were concluded with the Great and Little Osages, the Kanzas, and the Shawanees. The same year occurred the celebrated treaty of Prairie du Chien, by which the Indian tribes agreed to live in general and lasting peace among themselves. The boundary lines between the different tribes were also established. This was the first time in ten years that Clark had visited Prairie du Chien. Far and near could be heard the whisper among the tribes, "The Great Chief, the Red Head is coming". Here assembled the Sioux, Sauks, Foxes, Chippewas, Winnebagoes, Menominees and Ioways. The commissioners were somewhat disappointed that some of the Indians from up the Missouri had not come. By the consummate tact of General Clark and Governor Cass of Michigan the treaty was concluded and peace reigned. In Cass's words "They made the treaty of perpetual peace, and settled the boundaries between the different tribes which resulted in the United States sending a corps of surveyors and surveying the boundaries at great expense, and perhaps keep the Indians at peace until they were ready to go to war again." But, with a shrug of the shoulders, "they would have it so at Washington". The words of "Governor" Clark as he went homeward were, "Pray God it may last."

Of Clark's real interest in the Indians there can be no doubt, in proof of which I submit the following extract taken from his letter of March 1, 1826, to James Barbour, Secretary of War:

The events of the last twenty two or three years, from General Wayne's campaign in 1794, to the end of the operations against the southern tribes, in 1818, have entirely changed our position with regard to the Indians. Before these events, the tribes nearest our settlements were a formidable and terrible enemy; since then, their power has been broken, their warlike spirit subdued, and themselves sunk into objects of pity and commiseration. While strong and hostile, it has been our obvious policy to weaken them; now that they are weak and harmless, and most of their lands fallen into our hands, justice and humanity require us to befriend and cherish them.[3]

He continued in this strain a plea for their civilization. He labored hard to improve their condition. When in the course of his administration word was brought him that the traders were giving whiskey to the Indians his indignation leaped forth and the American Fur Company hastened to explain and to condone, so far as possible, their offence.

Because of the constant trouble arising between the whites and the Indians, Clark tried to induce the eastern tribes to sell their lands and move west of the Mississippi. With this in mind he set out in 1830 for Prairie du Chien. Many tribes from Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois adopted his advice. Money became exhausted, but Clark used his own resources and his credit to move them. He implored the Department for help. The whites became incensed at the constant depredations of the Indians. The Superintendent used every argument to prevail upon the remaining tribes to leave their exhausted lands and go west, but they invariably answered, "Another year".

Here again, we find Black Hawk stubbornly resisting the removal to the last. During his absence in Canada, Keokuk made the final cession, but Black Hawk refused to go; and in 1832 he invaded Illinois. War followed, resulting in the capture of Black Hawk, who was sent to

[3] *American State Papers, Indian Affairs,* Vol. II, p. 653.

St. Louis. Clark seldom went to see him because he could not endure seeing the haughty chief, who was his friend, thus humbled.

Clark was now growing old, but his vitality continued almost unabated. In 1837 news was brought to him that small-pox had broken out among the Mandans and had almost obliterated that tribe. The contagion spread. The Superintendent employed physicians in St. Louis to vaccinate. He sent them out, also, to the different tribes, but the superstitious Indians fled with the cry, "The white men have come with small-pox in a bottle."

All this excitement and the decimation of the tribes visibly affected Clark, and his health began to decline. On September 1, 1838, he died. One of his last requests was that he be buried in sight and sound of the Mississippi River.

A deep gloom fell upon St. Louis. Everybody mourned "Governor" Clark. The Indians wept for the "Red haired Chief" and soon disappeared entirely from the city that had been his home for more than thirty-one years. It was to him that they had looked in emergencies. It was to him that the Nez Perces from beyond the Rocky Mountains had sent their four chiefs in search of "the Book" which led the Methodists in 1834 to send out Jason Lee and four others to Oregon, to be followed two years later by Whitman and Spalding with their brides.

Thus lived and died William Clark, who, first as Governor, then as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, probably did more than any other man to reconcile the Indian to the attitude of the United States, as well as to make the United States see the need of the Indian. Although sometimes severe, the red man felt that he was ever just. All honor to the man who gave his treasure and his life to the work of establishing a harmonious relationship between the government and the Indian who felt that he had been unjustly treated. William Clark loved and lived

for his country and its interests, and was probably the most beloved, honored, and revered man in the West at the time of his death.